

073, I'm Not Gonna Stay by deardmvz

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Summary:

Billy & Steve go on a California road trip, and stumble upon something Billy thought he lost forever. Song is Sirens by Mia Giovina (highly recommend it!!)

073, I'm Not Gonna Stay

Billy almost crashes the camaro when he sees it, slamming on the brakes hard enough that he bobs forward.

Resting on the side of the road, its white paint turned a tan, brown stained color. Half dilapidated, with overgrowth of sand, ferns, and tall grass surrounding it.

The 073 on the doorway calls out to him, the shape of the 7 in the middle outlining where the number once was tacked on the door, years ago.

He thought it was lost forever, never to be found again.

“You good?”

Steve’s brown eyes leaned into Billy’s peripheral, his vision refocusing like a camera lens onto Steve’s knitted together eyebrows, pressing the extra skin into ridges. A lock of his brunette hair fell down into his face from the California breeze that’s let in by the open window.

“I don’t know.”

Billy quickly turned to put the car in reverse, backing it up along the edge of the road. The driveway is covered by the beach’s sand spray, the nothingness around the deserted house making it look odd against the clear blue sky and white, shrubbery littered dunes.

It’s the only house in this area, far out on the coastline where nobody else was around besides the occasional traveler’s car coming from

town, 7 miles away.

It's the house where if you walked across the front yard, over the sandy road, and through the tall grass bushes, you were right on the beach. Where during hurricanes, Billy and his mom hunkered down, praying that the ocean didn't swallow them whole.

He put the car into park, popping his seatbelt off and opening the door, getting out with an urgency as he was left to stare at the house.

"Hey- Hey! What's going on-" Steve pleaded, trying to figure out why they were suddenly parking in front of this weird beach house, out in the middle of nowhere on their way to a town that Billy *swore* had 'The Best' taco shop on the planet.

"This is my house."

Steve sputtered something else out but Billy paid him no mind, canvas sneakers already making their way around the car.

The first step into the sand yard felt odd, grains leaking in through the tiny holes at the bottom of his shoes. He didn't give a shit though, moving forwards as sand filled his shoes until he could make out the paved driveway that led to the house.

There had never been a garage, just a hangover off the side of the home. It looked to be gone now, just the bolts of it left in the siding.

Billy continued to walk up the drive', feeling 6 years old again.

His mom's out in the driveway with a glass of lemonade and sitting in her fold up chair, little Billy's on his hands and knees messing with chalk.

"Don't lick your hands William! That's not an eraser!" Her tone's not harsh at all, laughing as she lightly bats his hands away from his face. "Here, use your glass of water instead. Just pour a little onto the area

you want to erase.”

He’s nodding, going to find the glass. It fades away though, as the chalk drawings dissipate into white sand, blowing across the pavement as it shifts from ‘74 into ‘87.

The hums of her acoustic guitar seem to leak through the doors as Billy walks closer to the crumbling structure, her high voice echoing as she plays. Billy’s sneakers carry him over the driveway and towards the blue green algae stained door. The faint 073 on it, dirt crusted around the washed out white numerals, and the stain of where 7 was in the middle.

“ *They knocked down the old grocery store,* ” Connie sang, getting louder and louder as he came close.

“No, the new one don’t feel right.

Oh my brother, he is so sure.

But I’m lost without a clue

And call it Life .”

Billy knows nothing about the song besides it’s called ‘Sirens’, and on the occasion he’ll remember more and more of it, only to forget it later and cry as his memory of her slips further and further.

His mom sang it often, the guitar beckoning him in as his hands grip the handle of the door. He twisted, and it opened with ease, leaving

him to look at the carcass of the house.

The walls are still painted green, white peeling up as they curl from water damage. The brown carpets are full of sand and scum, water markings through the house's lower walls. There's random trash on the floor from where the ocean had finally licked its way inside, bringing debris in with the hurricane storms. The furniture and lots of other items are still there though, Connie Hargrove's wicker chair sitting in the once living room. It's half destroyed, but it's there.

Tears are beginning to fill his eyes as the sunlight pours through the half opened roof, beams and wooden bits littering the floor along with pieces of the ceiling. Dust dances in the light, seeming peaceful and full of mourning for the home it's wrongfully invaded its way into. Through a gaping ceiling hole, not a window.

"Hey-" Steve called, stepping in after him. Ceiling plaster crunched under his foot as he came to follow.

"Billy, what were you... did you really live here?"

Billy nodded, pointing at the chair. A tear slipped out, his back thankfully to Steve so he was unable to see.

Connie's acoustic guitar feels so loud here, like she's hidden under some invisibility cloak, playing chords in the chair again. Like it's spring of 1974 all over again, and they're both happy.

"That was my mom's chair. I guess the hurricane's and the ocean destroyed the place though... 's cool that it's still here."

Steve is surprisingly chill about it, understanding fast. He's good like that, jumping to get on board Billy's train. Just going with it,

understanding that ‘oh this is happening now- okay!’

“Oh - the mantles still got stuff on it too!” He gestured to above the small box TV, yellow coloring making Billy think of Saturday Cartoons. There’s a mantle above it, full of knick knacks. “Are these her’s too?”

Billy pawed at his eye then moved over to the area, starting to smile as he picked up a brass Elephant.

“These were her favorite animals. She got this one at a flea market, and she had to give up her bracelet in a trade because she didn’t have enough money for him. His name was....”

The name wasn’t coming to him, a big blank void. Jorge? Greg? Gus? He was so little, each day more and more of her slipping. What did they name the elephant? What was her favorite color? Was she really tall or was everyone else super short? Wait, what color were her eyes-

Each day, bits and pieces crumble off of his memory of her, falling deep into a ravine that holds the memories he can’t keep. Left unable to visualize it all, only hear the stories and imagine, unsure of the truth in it all.

“I can’t remember. But -” He picked up more items, this time a little carousel. He grinned at it, instantly taking it fully off the mantle.

“This was mine. I wanted it so bad and we saved for weeks to get it, I got so scared ‘cause we didn’t see it in the front of the store. The manager told us he had the last one in the back and I was so happy ‘cause I’d wanted it so bad.”

Billy’s grateful he can still remember that one. Even if he has to trade knowing that story for the Elephants name.

“Aww. How old were you?” Steve’s finger reached out, brushing the little chipped porcelain horse.

“Six. I lived here from when I was born to 7. I was born over uh-” he gestured, over the area where the roof had collapsed and into what looked to be a kitchen. Wanting to show him, he took up Steve’s

hand, pulling him under the hole and over the rumble, to where a disgusting looking sink sat. Water was pooled up, a few random dishes in it. He didn't dare reach in, unsure of what the fuck the water contained after being left for 13-14 years.

"Right here." He pointed at the area below the sink, at the floor that ran up the cabinets. "She told me she had contractions and she just sat down and like, had me? No doctor or anything, it was insane."

Steve's eyebrows were raised, staring at the spot below the sink.

"Damn. I know how you're so tough now, shit." One again, just rolling with it. It made Billy's heart swoon. He smiled in response to the comment, carousal tucked under his arm.

"Are we bringing that home?" The brunette asked, eyeing it.

"I saved up my coins for it- I get to keep it."

Steve rolled his eyes, a smirk on his face. "I bet if we use the grocery bags in the trunk we can take some stuff. Clean it up, put it in a glass case when we get home?"

Oh god, Steve was somehow even more perfect.

Billy was absolutely on board with that idea, instantly beginning to tug on Steve to go look for more items.

Billy thought doing this would be sad.

Going through the abandoned beach house (in his dreams it was not with Steve, but he was an added bonus), picking up his old stuff. But it was actually therapeutic, finding his mom's light rotary phone still on her room's desk. He grabbed it as well, knifing the cord off it. The shit wouldn't work anyways, but the phone itself was special.

Her bed was sunken in, sheets still on it. He didn't sit on, no matter how much he wanted to just lay down and see if the pillows still felt like warm heaven, full of getting tickled and reading late night bedtime stories. Now, they were probably only filled with nature's favorites, bed bugs.

Her bathroom was a disgusting mess of overgrowth and scum, but

still her. Billy grabbed a perfume bottle from there, laughing hysterically when Steve pressed the pump and got a face full of the ancient liquid. Her smell filled the room, Billy breathing it in before it fell to the ground, letting him now for sure what perfume she wore. Charlie, by Revlon. He could have sworn that with the smell of it, she was right next to him.

They grabbed a few other things, Billy finding her jewelry box for Steve to carry. It rattled, Billy excited to see its contents.

“Let’s go sit out on the beach and open it - it’ll be more fun, plus I think there’s mold in this place. Don’t wanna get sick from staying in here too long.”

Billy, slightly begrudgingly, agreed.

So they finished up their tour, checking out Billy's childhood room, which was empty, besides the bed frame.

Once Neil had taken him and Connie from the beach to live with him in the city, all of his stuff had been moved quickly while hers stayed. When she died two months later, none of her things had even been packed.

Instead it all rotted in the house, Billy desperately trying to figure out how to get back there.

He forgot the address and the complicated way out there before he grew to be brave enough to run away from Neil, moved around too much and too young to remember where exactly the house with no real address was located on the fringe, a middle of nowhere, California beach.

They left the house’s door closed, Connie’s guitar and presence hushing down as they left.

The two left with her jewelry box, Billy's carousel, the perfume, the

rotary phone, the elephant, and a few photo albums that Billy had yet to open. Steve had just found them, flipping through before uprooting them all from their shelf and yelling “we’re taking these!”. Billy made no fight against it.

The two walked across the way to the beach, sand skittering across the road as Billy’s feet became kids size 4’s again and a white surfboard slapped his hip as he half walked, half ran. He stepped off the road and the sand blew over again, as the formed in men’s size 10 converse, and an armful of antique junk.

The two found a spot, maybe 30 feet from the water, sitting down as Steve began with the photo books.

Billy’s baby pictures sprang out, Steve’s white teeth flashing.

“I had to grab them - look at how cute you are! And -” the flipped the page. The contents surprised Billy.

There she was, in a photo Billy never knew existed. In some hawaiian themed bar, him in a sling across her breasts, her smiling into the camera as he was trying to bite her hair. Long, curly blonde locks. Blue eyes, just like his. Tall, but not too tall. She looked around 5’8, with bare feet and an elephant tattoo around her ankle that Billy had forgotten existed. The St. Christopher’s pendant around her neck, a sparkling diamond wedding ring on her finger.

She was beautiful.

“Holy shit Stevie...” His fingers caressed the image, trying to check its reality.

“She’s gorgeous Bill. I saw her and I knew- you both have the same nose. And eyes too.”

Billy let out a laugh of bemusement, trying to figure out what to make of it all. There she was, right there. She was real, now Steve

had seen her too. He'd never gotten one photo of her, only the St. Christopher's pendant to keep her memory.

He could finally put a clear face in his memories, like picking back up a piece back out of the unretrievable memory ravine.

And best of all, he'd just added a new memory of her to Steve's memory.

"Yeah. She was beautiful... I really do miss 'er."

Steve offered a hand of comfort, coming to let Billy lean on his shoulder as they flipped through the pages.

More baby photos, little Billy playing with sidewalk chalk and his first steps, or him doing the little peace sign to 'imitate mommy' as the photo's caption said. Her words, written in black sharpie below each one with dates.

A collage of their memories together, a time when all was much more innocent.

It took maybe an hour to get through them all, Steve dog earring the pages that contained his favorites. Billy didn't even tell him not to, too in love with how he cooed over the photos and gave Billy kisses on the cheek, admiring how precious he was.

But once the book and its counterparts were scoured through up and down, and Billy was well fawned over, then came the jewelry box.

"What'd thinks gonna be in here?" Steve asked, inquisitive shaking the box like it was a Christmas present. It was cute to see him all excited and playful. Sharing Connie's memory with Billy - he knew she would have loved him and his adorable fighting spirit.

"Dead bugs?"

Steve stuck his tongue out, gagging.

"Gross." His fingers flicked up the little brass hinge locks, the drawers opening as the contents spilled out onto the back of the photobooks, able to be displayed under the shining sun.

There were dead bugs, yes. A spider and something else, Steve flicking away before they both saw the contents.

First was an earring, silver, a little feather dangling off it. There had to be another one somewhere in the world - but with a good soak in some alcohol and cleaning, it'd fit perfectly for Billy. One earring for one pierced ear.

And then the rest.

Connie's bracelets, an array of her rings. Billy began to pick at them, stopping when his fingers touched one in particular.

"Holy shit." Steve breathed, Billy raising it up to the sun. The diamonds sparkled, catching their first glimpse of sunlight in years. Connie's wedding band, sitting in Billy's worn fingertips.

Billy knew it was far too small for him. It was so painfully obvious, with his meaty fingers too wide and soft to slip the dainty band around more than halfway of his pinky without getting stuck.

But his eyes fell down.

Down onto fingers that were long and slim, perched on thighs that were dotted in moles.

"Give me your hand."

"What?!" Steve seemed shocked at this, hands pulling up. For some things, like gift receiving, Steve didn't roll with it. He always got defensive, a belief of 'not appreciating or deserving what he got' ingrained into his head. A negative downfall of seeing how spoiled he was compared to Billy..

"That- hey Billy no! Don't you try to give me that asshole - I'm not special enough for that what if I lose it or I break it, can y-"

"I don't care." He huffed, reaching at Steve's left hand. "Give." The

other spluttered out some protest but it died, Billy's hand still reached out to him.

Big blue eyes, trying to tell him something.

Steve put his hand out, offering its shaky but spread fingers.

"The things so special Billy, I don't get why you want to see it on me, It's so fucking pretty Billy but like I'm not-"

The ring slipped onto the finger next to his pinky, Billy smiling. Steve fell silent as he looked, eyes bewildered at how well it fit.

It was a sign from her. Her perfume floated into his nose as she seemed to whisper in his ear.

Do it.

So he did.

"Marry me?"

"WHAT!" Steve screeched, hand jerking a little. Billy just laughed, teeth showing. Fucking laughed his ass off at Steve's reaction, rolling off his shoulder to giggle into the sand.

"Marry. Me?" He asked again, still cackling.

"YOU- I- I WAS GONNA- YOU-" He blinked, wildly looking around.
"DID YOU PLAN THIS?!!"

Billy laughed even harder, shaking his head.

"No! I just- it's so perfect- its so fucking ironically perfect, I had to. Just feels right."

Steve's expression softened, face still bewildered though as he thought. The confusion melted into laughter though, gripping Billy's

hands back as he rocked, chuckling.

"This is so fuckin' cheesy oh my god - I love it. Are you sure though - this is a big thing and like its HER ring I don't know if I'm the best person, like this is really special and-"

"Steve." He grabbed his hands tight. "Shut. Up. You're special. I want this. Your answer though?"

Steve's eyes searching Billy, hopelessly trying to sense a joke. Trying to see if he was fucking with him - but the smile and the hopeful glimmer was too real.

So he exhaled, looking down at the ring and then back up.

"Yeah. Fuck yeah I want to marry you. Dear god though - you have got some serious trust in me. To give me - this?" He held up the ring, still perfectly perched on his finger.

"You are batshit crazy."

"Only for you."

Steve leaned in, kissing him as his hands went up into his hair. Cool metal brushed behind his ear, feeling comfort in it.

Like he was both 6, being comforted by her, and 20, kissing the love of his life.

The time between the spree proposal and the playful arguing that followed (mainly from Steve explaining how he was gonna plan some big, stupidly cheesy proposal and this spur of the moment thing had blown everything he'd thought up out of the water completely).

But after sitting with each other on the beach, now engaged, time did start to wind. And it began to push them up, telling them to get a move on.

"I love it here, but I think we gotta go get our taco's. Plus, I wanna see the stuff you told me about. Maybe we can come back, sleep on the beach?"

Billy shook his head.

“Nah. Tide comes in too far- ‘sides, I already have a room booked at the town inn after tacos.”

Steve’s head tilted.

“You sure? I don’t mind coming back here and stuff-”

“Steve. I think this place is just meant to be a one time thing.” He gestured to the crumbling house, sighing. “M not supposed to try to stay here... staying here, trying to come back - that would be like trying to stay in the past.”

Steve was confused, trying to figure out how to vocalize his thoughts. Billy figured them out already though, answering them.

“I love my mom and this place. But I can’t try to hold onto it forever.

I’m ready to let go.”

“Oh!” He got it, shoulders slackening. He got it. “If you’re ready to go, let’s put this stuff in a bag and get going - I wanna drive this time too.”

This time Billy rolled his eyes.

“Of course sweetheart.”

The jewelry was swept up into a box, the rest of the ‘junk’ going into the floor well of the back seat in a shopping bag. Covered up in safety, packed by other plastic bags so nothing would knock together and break.

Billy shut the door of the camaro, turning to look at the house for a moment.

“Hey - Stevie. You still got that camera still?”

The camera thing had been a last minute buy, the old polaroid there for quick photo development while they had no time to go get stuff developed on their trip across California.

“Mm? Yeah, whats up?”

“Go sit on the car, Dukes of Hazzard style. I want a picture.”

Steve turned his head a bit, trying to figure him out.

“Engagement photo.” Billy explained. Steve got it with a little ‘ah’, grinning as he kicked off his shoes and jumped in the window, ass finding itself on the top of the door panel, half of his body leaning out and resting the top of it on the roof.

Adorable.

Billy took the photo, grinning as Steve showed off those pearly whites for the camera, ringed hand held up.

The shudder snapped as it captured the scene - His favorite guy, sitting on his blue camaro all pretty, in front of his childhood home. His mothers wedding ring raised up on his finger, proud to be a part of Billy’s life. A seagull in the background, a white blip on light blue sky.

Steve slipped into the car fully once he was done, shoes tossed into the backseat. Driving barefoot, again, despite how many times Billy told him not to.

“Date it - July 28th, 1987.” He passed a sharpie to Billy through the open window, Billy shaking the image a little to make it develop faster. He took the sharpie though, as the guitar acoustics seemed to float back in.

He pressed the polaroid into the car's roof, using it as a makeshift table. Writing down in his best hand the date, putting ‘Engagement to Stevie’ under it.

Billy looked at the sharpie, smiling as the guitar began to sharpen, focusing in as he wrote.
The words, finally becoming clear.

“Wait here.” He said, passing Steve the still developing polaroid, sharpie in the blondes hand.

He walked back to the house, thumb stroking the side of the sharpie until he came up the the front of the house, below where the bolts for the overhang carport had been..

And on the dirt ridden, scummed over then white, now tan, brown stained siding, he wrote the words to the song.

“ If I make it out to New York

Will I miss the sunset drives

I know growing up is due for me

But I’ve never been the type to fall in line

They knocked the old grocery store

And no the new one don’t feel right

Oh my brother he is so sure

But I’m lost without a clue and call it life

Where do I go

How do I know

*I don't hate Jersey
But it's not good for me
Lost a dream so i could fit in
A neighborhood of politicians
Wasting the life i'm chasing
Maybe i'll be back in 10 years
When metros get too fast
Cus I don't hate Jersey
But it's not good for me*

*Thought I found myself at 18
Then I spent a year alone
Purple walls get suffocating
But they've watch me heal and break and brought me home*

*So I don't hate Jersey
But it's not good for me
Lost a dream so i could fit in
Neighborhoods of politicians
Wasting the life i'm chasing
Maybe i'll be back in 10 years
When metros get too fast*

Cus I don't hate Jersey

But it's not good for me

I'm not gonna stay I'm gonna get away

I'm not gonna stay I'm gonna get away

I'm not gonna stay I'm gonna get away

I'm not gonna stay I'm gonna get away

I don't hate Jersey

But it's not good for me

I don't hate Jersey

But It's not good for me."

At the end, as the music began to fade, he penned in her.

"Home of Connie Emilia Ha"

He scribbled out the HA, writing instead her original last name.

*" Home of Connie Emilia Ha Lusicke. Loving Mother, Beautiful Woman.
May she be reincarnated as an elephant. May 1, 1949 - June 7, 1975."*

He stood back to admire his work, a few tears coming to his eyes. He didn't bother to hide them this time, just turning back to Steve, who sat in the driver's seat, smiling.

"C'mon baby - let's go get tacos, okay?" He shouted, those kind eyes inviting Billy to come back. Not minding the tears at al.

He nodded, turning to the blue green door of the house.

"Goodbye Mama."

He walked back to the car, getting into the passenger seat. His

mothers ring flashed on Steve's hand, coming up to wipe away tears and softly stroke his cheek until he nodded. The hand moved to the shifter, car pulling back onto the road and moving onwards.

They drove off, leaving the house marked 073, off in the middle of nowhere on the beach, with white turned tan, brown stained paint, and a large hole in the roof right next to the kitchen where Billy's mom birthed him, in their rearview.

And for once, in his whole life, Billy didn't feel the need to run back to it, searching for a mom he'd long lost. He'd come to terms and made a new, finally closing the chapter of longing.

The house is swept up in the sand, disappearing as it blows back to the ocean.

So it goes.

The origins and young memories of the house will one day disappear from Billy's mind too, nothing but a memory lost to time. Was the door blue or yellow (Blue Green)? Was it the elephant or the carousel that he had wanted so badly (The carousel)? Was it his mom's chair, or bed that was left there, maybe even both or none (Both)? What were the lyrics to the song, and what was the day she died on (Saturday)?

One day, it'll all be lost to the sands of time. Swept into the ravine in his mind, where memories go to not be accessed again. The house will only remain as a childhood home, the background in a picture of a pretty husband, perched on a highschool car, just engaged to him. Billy doesn't mind though.

For even without the house, and his mother, he'll be okay. He doesn't need to cling to every piece of her - he can let go.

He has all he needs right here with him now, sitting in the driver's seat while the breeze brushes back brown locks and their hands intertwine on the shifter.